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SUBJECT: Ambassador J. Christian Kennedy visits Slovenia, reiterates
USG interest in prompt resolution of Jewish restitution process.

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Ambassador J. Christian Kennedy visited Slovenia from October 14-16, during which he reiterated the USG interest in seeing a prompt resumption of the stalled negotiation process between the Government of Slovenia and the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) regarding the restitution of Jewish property.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) During discussions on the Jewish restitution issue with Ambassador Roman Kirn, Head of the Americas Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Kirn stressed that the Slovenes are ready to start the process, but they are still waiting on the WJRO study to be complete. He told Ambassador Kennedy that the process will continue with the next government, but that it will take some time for the new government to be ready to address the issue. Kirn gave no hint of whether or not the issue will remain under the Ministry of Justice, or if it would shift to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¶3. (U) When Ambassador Kennedy asked if there will need to be adjustments to the citizenship of claimants who abandoned their citizenship when they left Slovenia after WW2, Kirn responded that this is addressed in the Slovene study, but did not elaborate. He said that it will be hard to return the citizenship to those who abandoned it, but conceded that the issue will have to be addressed during the talks. Kirn stated that the process will have to begin within the framework of existing restitution laws, but acknowledged that new legislation will be required to finalize the issue.

¶4. (U) Kirn mentioned that he felt that the Maribor synagogue could be help build a sense of the importance of Jewish history and contributions to Slovenia. He suggested that a Center for Jewish Heritage and Studies could be established at the synagogue.

¶5. (U) Ambassadors Kennedy and Kirn also discussed the upcoming Prague Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets, which will take place June 26-30, 2009. Ambassador Kirn noted that Slovenia has received the invitation to attend, but was concerned that there was not enough information about the conference that would define roles and expectations at the conference. Ambassador Kennedy explained with some detail the main areas that the Czech invitation highlights: Moveable property (which could include looted art and archives); Real Estate Property; Insurance; Forced and slave labor; and Holocaust Education. Kennedy also said that he would be in Prague October 22-24 to talk with the Czech side about arrangements and agenda items. His conversations would also include the suggestions that a Friends of the Chair group be established and that working groups be created for each theme. Ambassador Kirn hoped Ambassador Kennedy would inform him and others about the goals of the conference and to encourage the Czechs to make the goals clearer, to ensure maximum participation. Ambassador Kennedy said he would get back to Ambassador Kirn after his trip to Prague.

¶6. (U) Ambassador Kennedy had a more general conversation with President Turk's Diplomatic Advisor, Dusan Snoj, who is not as well versed in the issues as Kirn. Kennedy's primary message to Snoj was that the President should use his moral authority to help create the environment for a settlement. Snoj noted that the President met Dan Mariaschin of B'nai B'rith in New York on the margins of this year's UNGA, but the two did not get into a discussion of restitution. The President is interested in the issue and wants to be kept informed. He is also aware that legislative changes may be required to implement an eventual settlement. Snoj said he looked forward to

meeting Mariaschin when the latter comes to Slovenia. Snoj also expressed interest in the upcoming Prague conference, and asked that the Embassy keep him informed.

¶7. (SBU) Ambassador Kennedy met with the President of the Slovenian Jewish community, Andrej Kozar-Beck, to discuss the prospects for prompt resolution of the issue with the upcoming government. Kozar-Beck speculated that it will take 3-6 months before any new government is in a position to deal with the restitution issue, but that he then expected talks to proceed smoothly. He quoted 15 million USD as a potential restitution figure - but said that the figure could have been up to 250 million USD if communist-era records of real property were considered. (COMMENT: Kozar-Beck is not a popular leader, and most of the board surrounding him has resigned. There is a push to find a new leader, and one contact has mentioned Lev Kreft, a former parliamentarian, as a potential successor. END COMMENT.)

¶8. (U) During his meeting with Irena Sumi, the lead researcher on the WJRO project, Kennedy asked how she expected the restitution plan would proceed. She said the problem was with current Justice Ministry officials - and they will be gone soon. She hoped that the portfolio for property restitution and compensation would stay in the Justice Ministry because the mid-level people there understand the issue. She confirmed that her report is nearly ready and that it could be presented in time to begin January discussions with a new government. In her report, Sumi will propose that the government of Slovenia return citizenship to those who were forced to abandon it to leave Slovenia after the war - something no other government has done before. (COMMENT: Sumi promised that the WJRO report was near completion over a year ago but has yet to present a completed package. END COMMENT)

¶9. (U) During a trip to eastern Slovenia, Kennedy met Erika Fuerst, a 77-year old Auschwitz survivor, and toured the monument park in Murska Sobota that stands where the Jewish cemetery was originally

located. Ms. Fuerst, one of only two living holocaust survivors in Murska Sobota, showed pictures from a history of Murska Sobota and indicated which houses had belonged to Jewish families. She talked about the families that did not return from the camps and said that of those who did return, most made their way to Israel shortly after the war. She expressed concern about the accuracy of the WJRO research team in Murska Sobota, saying they had counted some properties that were sold or otherwise compensated. Ambassador Kennedy assured her that the research would be thoroughly compared with the GoS' study to make sure there was no double-counting or other significant errors.

¶10. Ambassador Kennedy has cleared on this cable.

GHAFAFI